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STAT

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Who, Me?

MAJ. Roberto D'Aubuisson came to town as such a zealot for constitutional government, human rights and the democratic process that you might have thought he was a victim of mistaken identity.

Little Caesar suddenly turned up claiming to be Tiny Tim.

Our former ambassador called the jockey-size major "a pathological killer."

To many in Congress, he is "Murder, Inc.," leader and organizer of the death squads that have claimed some 40,000 civilian lives in El Salvador since 1979.

But at a steamy press conference, sponsored by and packed with fans from the Young Americans for Freedom, D'Aubuisson was giving moral judgments about another politician on tour, the Rev. Jesse Jackson. Did the Jackson mission to Central America improve the chances for peace? An expression of total satisfaction passed over his taut little countenance.

"If he is doing it for moral reasons," he said condescendingly, "he is perfectly entitled to do so. If for political reasons, then he is out of place."

On "Nightline," he told Ted Koppel that he knows nothing about the plot against Bishop Oscar Romero — the prelate was murdered as he was saying mass in 1980 — and, although U.S. officials suspect his involvement, even less about the more recent cabal to knock off our present ambassador, Thomas C. Pickering, whom he graciously referred to at his press conference as "a friend."

As for his complicity in various other murder plots, he said they were made by "a paid accuser" — a concept that pained one of his delicate sensibilities.

His pitch can be described in a single word: "Moi?"

The Washington D'Aubuisson exchanged chitchat with Secretary of State George Shultz about electoral turnouts. Shultz, he said, was frankly envious of the 85 percent turnout in El Salvador's recent exercise. "How do you get so many to go to the ballot box?" was the Shultz quote rendered in D'Aubuisson's staccato Spanish.

When he went to see Langhorne Motley, assistant secretary for inter-American af-

fairs, D'Aubuisson took along a copy of his country's new constitution, a document he might well carry on his person at all times, so great is his reverence for it.

This is obviously not the thug who went before the Kissinger Commission last October and outraged its members with his casual dismissal of charges that he fingered as communists on television certain citizens who later turned up dead. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland took particular exception to D'Aubuisson's practice, since one of its targets was a land reformer sponsored by U.S. labor unions.

"Many I mention are not killed," D'Aubuisson replied arrantly.

D'Aubuisson is going to support El Salvador's new president, José Napoleón Duarte, as long as Duarte "remains within the constitutional parameters." The bloodthirsty crusader who campaigned on a platform of

exterminating the rebels did not mention communists and reacted mildly to questions about his support for Duarte's vague plans to negotiate with the guerillas.

But who made those charges that the CIA had bought the election for Duarte? And who called Pickering "the leader of the death squads against democracy?" It must have been somebody else. The visiting statesman knows virtually nothing about it. The most he could say was that there were "popular rumors" about the Venezuelan Institute for Education as a front for the CIA.

But, you see, it doesn't really matter, said the convert piously, "Votes cannot be bought — they represent the solemn will of the people."

It was all a bit thick, but D'Aubuisson's coach in reputation restoration is Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), a man for whom the word excess has no meaning. The Senate's leading

fascist-fancier, who is running for re-election, somehow thinks there are votes in championing an admirer of Hitler.

In his previous incarnation, D'Aubuisson expressed to German reporters his regard for genocide: "You realized that the Jews were responsible for the spread of communism, and you began to kill them."

D'Aubuisson's admiration was echoed by another public figure who played a squalid role in our domestic politics. Jesse Jackson refused for too long to disclaim the Rev. Louis Farrakhan who regards Hitler as "wickedly great," and who, while Jackson was dickering with Fidel Castro in Havana, called Judaism, a "dirty religion."

Jackson, the liberator, was a prisoner of his fear that if he repudiates Farrakhan, it would cost him some support in his hopeless quest for the presidency. Ronald Reagan is a fellow hostage, powerless in the grip of his bizarre Central American policy. He let D'Aubuisson into the country because if he didn't, he feared the little major would revert to his former self — when the guns did the talking.